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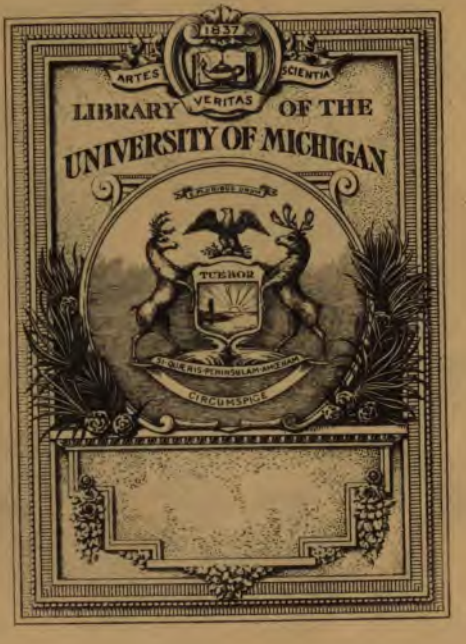
McMurtrie. Care of Crippled Soldiers + Sailors.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Care of Crippled Soldiers and Sailors: A letter published in the New York *Evening Post* of August 31, 1917

Douglas C. McMurtrie
President, Federation of Associations for Cripples
Editor, American Journal of Care for Cripples

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Care of Crippled Soldiers and Sailors

One of the more important social problems of the war consists in the reconstruction, physical and economic, of crippled soldiers and sailors. Under the old order men disabled in the war were supposed to be compensated by pension, the amount of which was always insufficient, and the influence of which was socially demoralizing. Except in cases of men with unusual force of character and initiative, the crippled soldier almost starved in idleness on his pension, became partially dependent on kindly relatives, or obtained admission to a soldiers' home.

The examination of details of the treatment in any number of cases accorded in the past to disabled men, is most discouraging, and tends to show a lack of both intelligence and gratitude in dealing with men who have made personal sacrifices in the service of their country.

But there seems now to be possibility of a new order. When whole nations were called to arms, the European governments, in face of the pressing demand for industrial productivity, discovered that they could economically utilize the labor of those physically handicapped. Though such men were disqualified from following some trades, it was found that, with special training, they could satisfactorily pursue certain others. This was further seen to be at once advantageous to the state and to the individual.

In France there is an extensive system of schools for the industrial reeducation of crippled soldiers—schools which were started mainly by private effort, but with the financial cooperation, in most instances, of some branch of the national government. There has been some recent effort to establish for these schools a central control, but their organization has gone too far to make possible much constructive influence on their policy.

The early work in England was left wholly in private hands, and suffered greatly thereby. The provision varied in character and thoroughness in each locality, and in discharging disabled men from military service there was no guarantee whatever that they would be adequately cared for. A short time ago there was instituted an effort to cover the field through local branches of the statutory committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, but this provides national assistance to local enterprises rather than exercising over them a national control and enforcing uniform standards of work.

THE GERMAN SYSTEM

Even in Germany there is no centralized system of providing for the war cripple though there are many excellent institutions, each different from the other. The military authorities pay the expenses of disabled soldiers assigned to these local agencies, but do not control their policies or standards. Further, the arrangements of the war office with the organization in one city will vary from those made with another located elsewhere.

Canada alone saw early the necessity for provision of national scope, and established the Military Hospitals Commission, which has charge of convalescent homes and schools of reeducation throughout the Dominion. The only weakness of the Canadian Commission is the division of authority over the convalescent men between its own civilian officials and the members of the army Medical Corps.

As soon as the soldier in a convalescent home starts on the road to recovery he is assigned to classes in the workshops attached to the institution. Here the man who has made up his mind to be forever helpless learns that this is not the case. By accomplishing a little he is encouraged to do more, and in this process disused muscles and functions are brought again into activity. The occupational therapy of the workshops is one of the most potent agents of physical repair. So the physician in charge prescribes work in the shops rather than a stupid course of exercises in a medical gymnasium.

This industrial work is open to all patients in convalescent homes. Those who recover entirely and can go back again to their former occupations are discharged from the military organization. Those who are permanently handicapped, and it is believed would profit by thorough training in some trade, either new or related to their former employment, are enrolled for a course of reeducation. The subjects are many; the most popular are automobile operation and repair and machine-tool work. The classes in preparation for civil service examinations are also very largely attended.